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ABSTRACT

More than 80 delegates representing 17 Organisation for Economic Cooperation Development (OECD) member countries participated in a seminar directed toward policymakers and practitioners involved in establishing and maintaining linkages between secondary and postsecondary education, training, and employment. The seminar, which was jointly organized by the OECD and U.S. Department of Education, was designed to give participants an opportunity to accomplish the following: inform each other about different forms of articulation and alternative pathways permitting young people to prepare for qualified work, further learning, and active participation in social, political, and cultural life; explore effective responses to problems of educational and occupational orientation and to the risks of premature exit from education and training at the critical stage of transition to adulthood; and reflect together on promising ways of cooperation and coordination between the different levels of government, education system, and industry. Opinion regarding the process of establishing and maintaining linkages was divided. Most participants felt that educational reform should be generated through a series of initiatives around specific problems (a bottom-up approach). A second group of participants advocated a more systemic approach, and a third group called for developing linkages through an evolutionary process of experimentation. (MN)

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THE CHANGING ROLE OF VOCATIONAL AND TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING

LINKAGES IN VOCATIONAL-TECHNICAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING: SYNTHESIS OF DISCUSSIONS

Note by the Secretariat

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1. The attached document prepared by the general rapporteur of the seminar, Mr. Papadopoulos, presents the synthesis of the discussions of the policy seminar on Linkages in Vocation-Technical Education and Training held in Phoenix, Arizona, USA, from 19-22 March 1991. It was jointly organised by the United States Department of Education and the OECD in the framework of the Education Committee's activity on The Changing Role of Vocational and Technical Education and Training (VOTEC).

2. More than eighty delegates representing seventeen Member countries participated in the seminar, which was directed at policy makers and practitioners involved in establishing and maintaining linkages between secondary and post-secondary education, training, and employment. The aims of the seminar had been defined so as to provide participants with the opportunity to:

-- inform each other about different forms of articulation between secondary and post-secondary education and training and about alternative pathways which permit all young poeple to prepare for qualified work, further learning, as well as active participation in social, political and cultural life;

-- explore effective responses to problems of educational and occupational orientation and to the risks of premature exit from education and training at this critical stage of transition to adulthood;

-- reflect together on promising ways of cooperation and coordination between actors at different levels of government, the education system and industry, which carry joint responsibility for the provision of multiple, open and coherent pathways for young people's active participation in social and economic life.

3. This report is circulated to delegates to the Education Committee for **INFORMATION**.

Where are We with Linkages?

A Synthesis of Discussions

1. Attending the Phoenix Seminar was a rewarding experience, a feeling which was widely shared among participants. Discussion was rich and lively throughout the proceedings, sustained by the intrinsic importance of the topic, the high quality of the contributions, both by experts and country representatives, and the variety of viewpoints and insights which were brought to bear upon it. This attempt at a synthesis cannot possibly do justice to the wealth of the material and ideas generated at the seminar. It cannot, therefore, be even remotely seen as a substitute for this material, which is being prepared for publication at a later stage. What it can hope to do is to try and capture the flavour of the discussions and, by providing a structure of essential issues that were raised -- or omitted -- encourage access to the material itself and facilitate its assimilation.

The Agenda and the Setting

2. It must be said from the outset that the purpose of the Seminar was not to arrive at a set of conclusions or direct recommendations concerning policies for the future development of vocational/technical education and training, even though the policy orientation was constantly present in the discussions. It was rather an exercise in clarification and exchange, drawing on the collective but varied experience of the OECD membership on the major issues involved and their political and theoretical underpinnings.

3. "Linkages", as the central theme of the seminar, proved a useful operational concept in giving coherence to the complex array of predicaments currently confronting VOTEC policies and practices and different approaches to their solution. It was handled in four perspectives, each backed by an expert's analytical report which together constitute the backbone of the seminar material. These perspectives can be summed up as follows:

-- Structures of Provision: the Pathways Perspective

-- Learning Strategies: the Learning to Know and Learning to Do Perspective

-- Trade Unions and Employer Roles: the Social Partners Perspective

-- Policy Co-ordination: the Integration Perspective

4. Each of these perspectives was discussed separately, and by and large the analyses in the papers were accepted, even though it was recognised that

these papers were only provisional at this stage. A number of useful suggestions were made to the authors about points that needed to be further developed or gaps to be filled. It was felt, for example, that in the Social Partners perspective the role of trade unions was not adequately covered and did not match the detailed elaboration which was given to that of the employers. Participants expressed the hope that authors would draw on the discussions in preparing the final version of their papers for publication.

5. A number of additional points need to be made which transpired from the initial discussion of these four perspectives. The first point concerns their interrelationships, particularly between the Pathways and the Learning by Doing Perspectives on the one hand, and the Social Partners and Integration Perspectives on the other. But also, many of the issues that were raised in the discussion were seen to cut across all four perspectives and could not, meaningfully, be considered in isolation. Secondly, and related to the above, there was full recognition from the outset that linkages could not be discussed separately from the broader problem of VOTEC policies. It was not, therefore, surprising that much of the discussion at the seminar revolved around the central issue of the design and implementation of overall policies designed to improve the status and effectiveness of VOTEC, as will be evident later on in this report.

6. This, thirdly, came up against the difficulty that the very concept of "policy", of its instruments and manifestations, differs from one national setting to another. These differences were particularly in evidence as between federally constituted countries and those with more unitary forms of government but also, within both categories of country, between those with a strong tradition of decentralised systems of policy-making and administration and those where these functions remain the attribute of central government. In VOTEC, as in all other areas of education and training policies, this has been a perennial problem in international exchange and understanding

7. Finally, these difficulties tended to be compounded by differences in the use of language and terminology, particularly as between the US and European countries. In the US context, "vocational" and "technical", as reflected in the title of the seminar itself, were seen as interchangeable terms, spreading throughout the entire spectrum of educational institutions reaching into colleges and universities. In European countries they have more distinct connotations, "vocational" referring to the preparation of semiskilled and skilled workers while "technical" covers middle level and higher technicians, serviced by a distinct set of educational institutions or programmes. These differences were hardly thrashed out during the seminar, participants opting to apply their own interpretation according to their national traditions. Communication among participants was, however, facilitated by the fact that the vast majority among them represented the interests of the vocational/technical sector. While this encouraged a tendency on the part of some of the participants to lash out at the shortcomings of the general education sector, voices were also raised against denigrating any one sector, stressing the importance of common progress among all sectors, with in turn the need for forging closer links among them. In the rapporteur's opinion, a stronger sprinkling of general educationalists among participants in this kind of discussion would provide a useful stimulus for an even more provocative debate.

8. For example, one could not help but be struck by the unanimous alacrity with which the desirability of linkages was accepted without questioning. This is understandable in what concerns the need for greater permeability of educational streams and structures as a means of attenuating the traditional dichotomy between general academic education, on the one hand, and vocational and technical education, on the other, or that between education and training. It is equally understandable in the pursuit of a more holistic approach to the pedagogy of learning, in which experiential learning -- learning by doing -- is given its due place along with cognitive processes of learning, i.e. laying the myth that education is a matter for the head, and training for the hands, as Betsy Brand put it. But questions do arise when it comes to business/education linkages and partnerships -- questions about the intensity and motivation of the relationships, at what level and about who leads and who controls -- and these underlaid much of the discussion across all themes. The challenge raised in the Secretariat presentation -- "Linkages: Trap or Bridge?" -- was picked up, in particular in the discussion on the diversification of educational pathways. The danger that such linkages might lead to a take-over of education by industry was strongly underlined by many participants, particularly non-American ones.

9. The links between business and education featured prominently throughout the discussion, very much influenced by the US setting of the seminar, both the overall US context and the local, Maricopa Community Colleges, context. The latter provided eloquent examples of education/business links, imaginatively conceived and liberally funded, designed to ensure that the colleges play their full part in the local economy and cater to the employment needs of different categories of the population, both adults and young, particularly those which are most in need. This was in line with the dynamic new push on VOTEC at the Federal level, in linking training to welfare programmes, in reinforcing, through the TEC PREP programmes, the links between vocational/technical education and training in the last two years of high school and the first two years of post-secondary education, and in making it obligatory for federally supported VOTEC programmes to include components of general academic education.

A New Vision for VOTEC

10. The seminar was left in no doubt that these new initiatives at Federal level must be seen against the background of the sense of strong dissatisfaction with educational standards which prevails in the US. This feeling was most forcefully aired at the seminar by representatives of the US business sector. It carried the clear implication that nothing much in the way of forward movement could be expected from the entrenched positions of the educational system itself. What was needed, therefore, was a new and broader vision for VOTEC, and an improved status for it, which would then provide the cutting edge for overall educational improvement. This view of a dynamic system of VOTEC which, over and above its own specific objectives, would also serve as a catalyst for improving the overall quality and relevance of education was widely shared among participants. It was, of course, recognised that status is not something which can be decreed; and that it can only be achieved if the necessary conditions for high quality VOTEC are present, not only within the educational system, but also, and more particularly, in industry itself.

11. This vision of VOTEC is one in which traditionally the economic imperative is dominant, in line with the essentially economic role of VOTEC. The main ingredients of this imperative were readily recognised and accepted as applicable to all countries: the accelerated pace of technological change, accompanied by economic restructuring often with painful social consequences, compounded by changes in labour markets, jobs and skills requirements as well as by demographic changes resulting in a redistribution of age-groups, with fewer young people and more retired, and possibly leading to labour and skills shortages -- all of this in a context of increasing economic interdependence among countries, placing a premium on their competitiveness in which the quality of their human resources becomes paramount.

12. These changes were seen as presenting a formidable set of challenges for a revamped system of VOTEC. Against a general questioning as to whether occupations can remain the basis for determining the organisation of VOTEC, participants devoted a lot of attention to the way in which occupational structures are evolving. On the one hand, they remained perplexed by the uncertainties inherent in forecasting the precise nature of this evolution and the resulting difficulties in relying on occupations as a basis for organising education and training provision. On the other hand, it was recognised, and strongly underlined by many participants, that occupations do play an important pedagogical role in facilitating young people's personal development through their identification with clearly perceived roles in adult and working life. The discussion made it clear, however, that more attention had to be given to the preponderant role which the service sector and service activities are coming to occupy in the economy, reinforcing the spread of an employee culture in our societies, and to the fact that employees now at all levels deal increasingly with people and information rather than with things. The implications of this for VOTEC, particularly as they could apply to the opportunities towards which, by their education and training, young girls and women have been traditionally attracted, were not fully explored. The question behind this, of course, is to which extent apprenticeship systems as they now exist can respond to these new developments.

13. Social concerns featured prominently in the discussions, side by side with economic ones. The two were seen to be closely related, with the accent on the role that VOTEC could play in drawing more people into the mainstream of social and economic life and avoid the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups. In fact, considerable attention during the discussion was given to the problems of the disadvantaged and on corresponding measures to improve their condition. The distinction was made between micro measures, often referred to as of a fire-fighting type, to address the problems of specific groups or regions, and measures of a more macro nature, reflecting policy stances towards social equity in a broader sense. Most of the examples given at the seminar were of the former type, including some of those demonstrated in the site visits around Phoenix. All of these local examples, under dedicated leadership, seemed highly effective in their education/business/welfare links, but it was not possible to see how they could be generalised and provide a framework for continuous social and economic integration. Macro policies were dealt with mainly in terms of concepts and strategies rather than empirical demonstrations, apart from some of the US examples and, of course, the well-established dual systems in Europe. One additional and eloquent exception was that of the comprehensive policy recently put in motion in Australia, which attracted considerable interest. It highlighted the equally eloquent absence

of serious attempts at coherent policies in other countries. But even here, it remains to be seen whether the inherent contradictions between the economic and social objectives of VOTEC, and of education more generally, which are in turn reflected in differences in the status and social value of different programmes and of the social groups participating in them, can be resolved without a stronger dose of mainstreaming, at least at the level of basic schooling, however this may be interpreted in different countries.

14. The seminar did, however, fully recognise, and benefited from, the differences among countries in their approach to VOTEC, differences related to national traditions, political and social philosophies and industrial structures ultimately reflected in their educational systems. In particular, participants were aware that national systems of education, and of VOTEC more specifically, can be seen as serving the purpose of consolidating existing social structures, at the one extreme, or encouraging social mobility and restructuring, at the other. Most systems are probably innocent players in between these two extremes, but this helps to reinforce the point repeatedly made during the discussion, that no one system, however attractive it may seem within its own national context, can serve as a model to be replicated elsewhere.

15. As already noted, it is extremely difficult to separate out the discussion on linkages from the general considerations about VOTEC, sketched out above. It is nevertheless possible to identify several broad themes under which linkages were discussed cutting across the four categories of the seminar agenda. These items are:

-- Educational Structures and Learning Strategies

-- The Training of Young People and Adults in the Labour Force

-- Comprehensive Policies for Skill Formation

Educational Structures and Learning Strategies

16. This theme, and the issues it raises, were central to the whole discussion, and this was quite natural considering that the target population considered was primarily the school age group. The main concern here was how to improve the effectiveness of VOTEC and thereby enhance its status. To achieve this, the guiding question was how to facilitate individual choice and stimulate motivation as young people move through the maze of options available to them beyond basic schooling towards clearly discernible and equally worthwhile destinations, both to further studies and to employment. The question remained open as to whether this could be facilitated through a more diversified system of options or rather through a more consolidated set of offerings.

17. In this, it was recognised that individual choices are necessarily determined by the dominant institutional model which is in place in different countries catering to the needs of the bulk of the 15/16 - 18/19 year olds. At

the risk of over-simplifying, three such models could be distinguished across the OECD countries:

-- The Schooling Model, as it exists in North America, Japan and Sweden, for example, where the vast majority of young people remain within the formal secondary or high school until 18, following general study courses within which a number of options are available;

-- the Dual Model, as it applies in Germany, Austria and Switzerland, for example, in which the majority of students are channelled at a fairly early stage into apprenticeships, enterprise based but also involving prescribed attendance at schools as an integral part of the training;

-- the Mixed or Pluralistic Model, as is the case in such countries as France, Italy, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom, with a variety of institutional provision beyond compulsory schooling, offered within schools themselves, within enterprise or training agencies, or combinations thereof.

18. Unsurprisingly, it was the Dual Model which attracted most attention, and temptation for emulation, because of its apparent organisational clarity and its association with the economic and employment success of the countries within which it operates. It was the one that was less prone to change in its basic structure and articulation, though its proponents did recognise that it was not without its problems. These arose from the impact of changes in occupational structures, resulting in particular from the growth of the service sector, the increased knowledge component now required in all jobs, and changes in the social demand for education and training evidenced by the rising educational level of apprenticeship applicants. It was also noted that the success of such a model depends heavily on the availability of a type of enterprise organisation characterised by clearly defined roles for trainers and a clearly defined set of arrangements for the provision of training, which again may be peculiar to the countries within which it operates.

19. Be that as it may, it was not the intention at the Seminar to discuss the relative merits of the different models in question but rather to see what they needed in common in their efforts at improvement. In all these cases, the main instruments for effecting such improvements were seen to be: (a) changes in the curriculum and in training regulations; (b) reorganisation of teaching and learning. Though neither was discussed in great detail, a number of common trends and desiderata emerged pointing to directions of change.

a) Curricula

20. A serious problem seen here was the need to arrive at a better balance between what is "general" and what is "vocational", with reciprocal components added to each sector. In addition to satisfying epistemological requirements, this would help enhance the status of vocational and technical courses and give those participating in them better possibilities for transition to higher education studies and, more generally, for successful participation in further education and training. As a consequence of this, policies and procedures for access and admission to higher education institutions will need to be reviewed, thus building up a continuum throughout the system for all categories of

students. Coupled with the higher employment potential of vocational and technical courses, already reflected in the increased demand for them and in changes which have been occurring in the social composition of the student body attending such courses, this could eventually lead to greater parity of status and prestige between general and vocational/technical education. It is a process similar to what has already reached fruition within higher education itself, as between the university and the non-university sectors, in a number of countries.

21. The redefinition of curricula can no longer be left to the sole initiative or responsibility of schools and the educational sector. It has to involve dialogue with representatives of the world of work, both employers and employees, as well as with employment and training agencies. Appropriate mechanisms will need to be set up or reinforced where they already exist. The objective would be to institutionalise the process of curriculum renegotiation so as to improve its balance and relevance, while avoiding the risk that its core, long-term educational purposes, and its coherence and continuity, become vitiated by the need to respond to transitory or locally-defined requirements. For individual as well as broader national reasons, the quest for relevance must not be allowed to lead to situations where the curriculum is dictated by the local economy -- a danger which was felt to be particularly real in the context of increased decentralisation of educational decision-making.

b) Teaching and learning

22. Solutions to many of the problems discussed above were seen to be dependent on the capacity to introduce changes in the approach to teaching and learning itself. Two broad considerations guided the discussion. There is, firstly, the reality that the period of basic preparation, on which subsequent job-specific skills can be built, is becoming both more intense and increasingly extended, reaching beyond basic schooling and into higher education itself. This raises questions about the timing of the introduction of vocationally specific skills within the educational continuum. It was generally accepted that this is not a function of basic schooling and that when it does come, it can be done best in conjunction with the work place. A corollary to this is that the educational role of vocational programmes and courses needs to be improved as a contribution to this extended basic preparation. This brings out clearly the need for greater convergence of theoretical and practical learning throughout the educational experience of all young people.

23. Secondly, there can be no progress unless teachers and trainers are induced to become its spearheads -- hence the crucial role of teacher training, but also that of trainers. In the case of teachers, greater opening up to the world of work is necessary, as is a change in their approach to teaching and to school work more generally, with greater accent on empirical learning -- learning by doing -- drawing on lessons learnt from the work place. In the case of trainers, there is need to develop a capacity for the introduction of abstract concepts into vocationally based learning, necessitated by the growing information and knowledge components of all jobs. In many countries, this would imply improvements to the status of training, and of its support systems, as a function of the enterprise. In this way, teaching and training, though they can never be fully assimilated, can get closer to each other and new, more

exciting, learning situations would be created for both teachers and trainers and their pupils.

24. There was a strong feeling among participants that movement in this direction was particularly important in dealing with the problems of disadvantaged groups, those who remain unmotivated, and those who drop out prematurely, calling for an imaginative mix of education and work-experience programmes.

The Training of Young People and Adults in the Labour Force

25. The previous section dealt with a category of VOTEC questions directed at young school age people preparing to enter active life. It was natural, in this case, that the educational component should dominate and VOTEC initiatives and action be seen as essentially school-based. It was equally natural, when it came to people in the labour force, that the training dimension should be given prominence and be seen as fundamentally employment based. This is in line with the generally accepted notion that the work place provides the environment within which training in specific job-related skills can be best obtained and that enterprises themselves have their own strategies for the development of their human resources as part of their overall investment strategies. Such enterprise-based human resource development strategies acquire additional significance in times of labour shortages, due to smaller youth cohorts coming into the labour force, and the rapid obsolescence of skills brought about by technological change. Training becomes, thus, an essential component of enterprise policies in sustaining their competitiveness in the market.

26. However, not all grown-ups are in the work force; nor are all those who are in the work force equally amenable, or adequately prepared, to receive training. Moreover, not all firms are sufficiently equipped, or have the skills and capacity to undertake the required training themselves. This throws into sharper relief the links which are necessary between enterprise training, the educational system and its institutions, and government policy more generally. These links operate differently according to the different target groups concerned.

27. Although these issues were not discussed in great detail during the Seminar, three such target groups can be identified: the first group consists of those who, for one reason or another, have been by-passed by the educational system and, therefore, need remedial education to acquire the basic literacy and numeracy skills on which subsequent training can build. In many European countries this group is, for the most part, made up of traditional migrants from developing countries about whom little is, or can, be done to improve their educational lot, and definitely not so at the post-secondary level. The situation is different in the United States, where remedial education for literacy deficient adults is an important function of Community Colleges, under the open access system.

28. The second, and by far the largest, group consists of young people and adults in the work force. In this case, primary responsibility for their training lies with the enterprises, as already explained. In discharging this responsibility, enterprises often establish links with educational institutions in the reciprocal use of personnel and facilities, organised mainly in the

locality within which both operate. In this way, direct links are established between education and the local economy, as we saw during the site visits to the Maricopa College System. The extent to which such links, depending on their intensity and motivation, may lead to undesirable educational effects or distortion, was a matter which was repeatedly raised in the discussion. Small and medium-sized firms do not have the training capacity of larger ones, and this may result in an uneven distribution of training across the total work force. There is, thus, a role for governments in providing adequate incentives to ensure not only an adequate level of involvement in enterprise-based training but also its equitable distribution among different categories of the work force and of firms.

29. The third category consists of the unemployed or those at risk of becoming unemployed. Here the main responsibility lies with governments, working through its employment and training agencies, in close co-operation with both firms and educational institutions, as part of overall labour market policies. An essential challenge to such policies has always been how to design schemes for a more constructive use of unemployment benefits, with efforts increasingly directed at associating such benefits with the provision of training opportunities for the unemployed. Taken together with the general responsibility of governments in sustaining the overall level of skill formation, and appropriate investment therein, this opens up vast new vistas in the development of training markets. There was only peremptory discussion of training markets, focusing on the usual parameters of who pays, who benefits and who controls, as well as the importance of making information effectively available to all stakeholders. These issues were seen as relevant, but beyond the strict remit of the Phoenix seminar.

30. One group of issues which did get discussed as an essential component of training markets were those relating to credentialling. It was recognised that this was part of industrial relations and tripartite agreements, the objective being to ensure the transparency of qualifications, wherever they may have been acquired. At present, credentialling is heavily influenced, in its manifest forms, procedures and criteria, by educationally derived practices and standards which may not always be appropriate to the assessment of competences and qualifications deriving from the work environment. Though academic credentialling cannot be minimised or ignored, it is necessary to work towards systems by which such credentialling could be matched by industry-based credentialling. The ultimate objective would be to develop a common currency of qualifications, combining the two, and one which would be increasingly internationally oriented. A number of participants felt that this was an area in which the OECD could take the lead and that the present time was particularly opportune for such an initiative, at least in terms of an exploratory investigation.

31. It was equally felt, though not discussed in detail, that the whole question of the approach to adult learning and its pedagogical underpinnings needed closer attention. Very often the methods used were a mere replica of those applicable to children and young people, which were not necessarily appropriate to the interests, motivations and learning styles of adults. Conversely, in a system of continuous learning there would be clear need to rethink at least some of the learning processes and curricula in initial education and training.

Comprehensive Policies for Skill Formation

32. In a sense, this theme pulls together the various policy strands deriving from the whole discussion. The argument, supported by concrete country examples, was fully presented in Keith Drake's paper, complemented by Mari Sako's presentation on the role of employers and trade unions. It is difficult to summarise the richness of the discussion to which these presentations gave rise, but four issues can be singled out for comment.

33. Firstly, the links to other policies. It was easily recognised that policies for skill formation extended well beyond training policies as such; in fact, that the effectiveness of training policies was very much conditioned by policies concerned with the industrial structure of a country, the laws and policies governing wages and employment, -- policy and business policy in the sense of how firms organise work. Such policies have to be country specific and will, in particular, be influenced by the political philosophy prevailing in individual countries, especially as between countries which adhere to the principle of full employment and those where employment levels are allowed to fluctuate with the whims of market forces. It was also recognised that, in quite a lot of countries, training and related non-training policies have to have a very strong regional dimension and take account of regional particularities of industrial structures , values and needs. In all cases, the objective of policies in this broader sense would be to develop a robust and comprehensive framework of incentives designed to enhance the motivation of all young people to participate in the opportunities offered to them by training policies, on which the success of such policies ultimately depends.

34. All agreed on the necessity of such links, particularly to employment and industrial policies. It was recognised, however, that establishing such links called for integrated approaches at policy making level throughout a variety of departments and agencies, for which governmental machinery did not exist. In fact,the way governments are organised often creates incentives working against such integration. People looked hopefully to the Australian experience of how a comprehensive policy could work, but it was noted that even there the necessary links to the rest of the educational system, largely under the control of the States, did not seem to have been adequately articulated.

35. Secondly, there were the problems raised by the centralisation/decentralisation dilemma. No one dissented from the desirability of moving toward greater decentralisation in the design and implementation of training policies, and the marked move towards decentralisation which was evident in all countries was generally welcomed. But it was also recognised that new problems were thereby created. To start with, it is one thing legislating for comprehensive policies, quite another co-ordinating such policies among the various interest groups concerned and at the various levels of regional and local responsibility where such policies are applied. As noted by the French delegate, in what amounted to a cri de coeur, even the most rationally legislated national policies will remain ineffective unless they are accompanied by a meticulous process of dialogue and negotiations, particularly at local levels, designed to ensure their social acceptability.

36. This permeability between local and national interests finds its full expression in the need to maintain nationally recognised standards in skill

achievement and qualifications, essential to facilitating worker mobility in highly volatile economies and labour markets. This problem appears most acutely in federally constituted countries, as amply demonstrated at the seminar by the experience of Australia and the United States. It is also echoed in other countries, with unitary forms of government but with strong regional dimensions in the organisation of vocational education and training, as is the case in Italy. Increasingly, this need is being seen as ever more cogent in view of the growing internationalisation of labour markets, particularly among European Community countries. The need for a minimum of internationally recognisable vocational qualifications was repeatedly underlined during the discussions.

37. Thirdly, the issues raised above brought to light the crucial role of the social partners in the definition of comprehensive policies for vocational education and training. Two broad policy questions were addressed in this context: (a) what roles can reasonably be expected of employers and unions; (b) what strengths and problems exist in these expected roles and what policies can be pursued to build on them towards improving VOTEC provision.

38. There were no easy answers to these questions, even though it was generally recognised that the involvement of the social partners was vital to any attempt at revamping VOTEC. For one thing, it was recognised that there are various types of employers and unions. Enterprises may be privately owned, in the public sector, large corporations (like the example of Motorola, which was witnessed on the spot), but also small and medium-sized ones with fewer resources. On the unions side, these may be craft-based or industry-based. Enterprise unions, as is the case in Japan, have different incentives and responsibilities from unions organised along industrial lines, as is the case in most other countries. In addition, in many countries unions are split according to political ideologies, with corresponding interests and responsibilities. In all cases, the roles that employers and unions can play depend on the nature of interaction not only between themselves, but also with other actors and stakeholders in society, both at national and local levels, particularly the state, educational institutions and teachers, trainers and administration within those institutions and, of course, young people themselves.

39. Within this complexity, three specific forms or levels of co-operation surfaced during the discussion: (a) partnerships, mostly of a bilateral nature, between business and education, as already discussed, and operating mostly at the local level; (b) collective bargaining agreements, primarily between employers and employees, but also involving a role by the State, in which training is becoming an increasingly important component; (c) tripartite agreements among employers, unions and the State under which the social partners are systematically consulted and actively involved in policy-making, in setting standards in training and in monitoring not only the outcomes, but also the process of training provision. A typical case of such tripartism is Germany, where the roles and responsibilities of the various actors are statutorily set out within a regulatory framework. Other countries reach out for the same objective, i.e. to ensure consensus as a necessary condition for the conception and implementation of coherent training policies, but under less regulated arrangements. In all cases, one concern which was persistently voiced by participants was the need to guard against a predominantly employment-led system of VOTEC for all the distortions that it may produce in

terms of the distribution of training opportunities and the vitiation of its long-term educational objectives.

40. Finally, the issues discussed above raised questions about the very process to be followed in establishing policies for change. Opinion was divided between those, the majority among participants, who saw reform generated through a series of initiatives around specific problems, i.e. a bottom-up approach, and those who advocated a more systemic approach, as was the case in Australia, France and, until recently, Sweden. Advocates of systemic solutions argued that what was now needed was much more than isolated local or sectorial measures, however imaginative and effective these might be in their narrow settings, but which could not be generalised across the system as a whole, representing, in Keith Drake's words, mere policy grafts and flashes of success which only serve to illuminate the darkness of under-performing systems. Others argued that change can only come about as an evolutionary process, resulting from the cumulative effect of well-conceived pieces of experimentation, of trial and error.

41. In this, as in so many other issues discussed at the seminar, we could not get away from the realities of national circumstances and traditions. Yet all were agreed that the ultimate objective of such reform strategies should be the development of a dynamic VOTEC sector, one which would be fully integrated as part of a coherent system of opportunities for life-long learning, a system by which each individual, according to his or her interests and abilities, would be enabled to participate fully in the social and economic life of rapidly evolving societies.

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